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ABSTRACT

This publication deals with group counseling as a technique for dealing with delinquent youth. In a counseling session, youngsters discuss their experiences, feelings, and ideas under the guidance of a leader. Group counseling is recognized as an effective means of reaching hard-to-reach youth. It is hoped that through sharing, former attitudes may be altered or replaced by ones that are more acceptable to society. The publication stresses careful planning prior to the incorporation of group counseling. The booklet contains discussions of various aspects of the leader's role including: What does the leader represent to the group? What are his responsibilities to the members? What are the leader's goals for the group? How does he steer the members toward these goals? Group Counseling calls for an investment and dedication in time and effort on the parts of those involved. (WS/Author)

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# group counseling with delinquent youth

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# group counseling with delinquent youth

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# FOREWORD

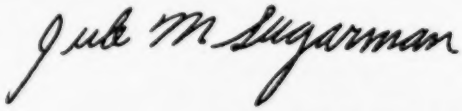
Group counseling is recognized by many workers in the field of juvenile delinquency as an effective means of reaching hard-to-reach youth. In a counseling session, a group of boys, or girls, discuss their individual experiences, feelings, and ideas under the skillful guidance of a leader. As these troubled youth learn how to "share themselves"—with each other and with their leader—former attitudes may be altered or replaced by ones that are acceptable to society. Group counseling, then, underscores the belief that young people can change—and that group sessions can help to bring this change about.

Before any new approach or program is adopted by an agency, it must receive the sanction of the administration. Then, if it is to survive, the new service must have the acceptance of the staff. For these reasons, *Group Counseling With Delinquent Youth* stresses the importance of careful planning prior to the incorporation of group counseling into the institution's overall program.

Because the group counseling technique involves how the group leader interacts with the members of the group, as well as how the members interact among themselves, the publication discusses various aspects of the group leader's role. These include: What does the leader represent to the group? What are his responsibilities to the members? What are the leader's goals for the group? How does he "steer" the members toward these goals?

Group counseling calls for a big investment on the part of administration and staff. It asks for their dedication. It exacts much time and effort. For the group leader, it requires his ability to deal not only with his own uncertainties and frustrations, but to meet constructively the angers and hostilities of the group mem-

bers. At the same time, it demands workers who have confidence in youth and who want to help young people through difficult times. The Children's Bureau hopes that its publication, *Group Counseling With Delinquent Youth*, will encourage workers in correctional settings to meet this challenge.



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# group counseling with delinquent youth

"The faster I run, the further I fall back" might well describe the current plight of probation officers and institutional staff trying to reach hard-to-reach delinquent youth. They have accordingly sought new approaches.

One approach receiving increased attention is group counseling.

Group counseling is a method of treatment which seeks to help delinquent youth learn how to make satisfactory adjustments to society. Under the guidance of a leader, group sessions deal with behavior and responses to the here-and-now as they work toward the adoption of more acceptable patterns of behavior. Within this group setting, the individual boy, or girl, can be helped to achieve a balance between his needs and socially acceptable behavior.

Group counseling has been used in a variety of correctional settings. It has also been used in working with the mentally retarded and their parents, and with the mentally ill. Group counseling, however, does not deal with deep-seated emotional conflicts.

Reports on the success of group counseling have varied (13, 22). The enthusiasm of some counseling leaders has been tempered by the disappointment of others who feel their success disproportionate to the energies expended. Therefore, group counseling will not be portrayed here as a panacea to eradicate delinquent behavior; rather, it will be described as a method shown to be successful with some delinquent youth. Group counseling does not purport to replace, or to compete with, other methods for working with individuals and groups. But it may complement them and add another dimension to the helping process.

Group discussion of selected topics is the method of treatment used in group counseling. The young people discuss everyday happenings, their reactions to other people and other people's re-

actions to them, values, standards, and barriers to achieving acceptable goals.

In addition to group discussions, program stimulants, such as movies, role playing, puppets, or other activities designed to foster reactions and involvements, are also used. The use of program aids will be determined by the characteristics of group members, such as age, degree of sophistication, ability to relate impersonal experience to personal experience, and the leader's ability to properly use such aids.

While membership in groups can be varied, it will be limited here to delinquent youth under the care of an agency.

Many questions are asked by people who are considering group counseling. Among these are: What should we do to establish a group counseling program? What new techniques do we need to learn? What are the pitfalls? How is the role of the group leader different from that of a probation officer or caseworker in an institution? What is the role of administration?

Pressures to learn the new method as quickly as possible bring out other questions, such as: Is it possible to learn about somebody else's group counseling program and adopt it for our court or institution? Or, is general background sufficient to convene a group?

These and other questions form the background against which this pamphlet was written.

# I.

# THE STRUCTURE OF GROUP COUNSELING

## How groups are formed

In the correctional field, rarely does a delinquent youth have an opportunity to choose between being treated on an individual or group basis. Where mandatory group counseling has been formed by an institution or probation department, a youth is assigned to a group just as he might be assigned to a cottage or probation officer. He has no choice. His obligation to attend group meetings is as great as his obligation to report for individual counseling sessions, and failure to report is a matter of grave concern. However, when the youth does have a choice, the program is explained to him, and he is offered the opportunity of joining a group (5, p. 361).

Group composition, therefore, is one factor which determines treatment success or failure. Because each person in a group participates in the treatment process of other members, careful consideration must be given to the personalities of those being considered for membership, the goals of the group, and how many members there should be. A leader should select members on the basis of their needs and possible contributions. Such a process would require a study of the delinquent's record, an interview with him as an applicant for group membership, and, in appropriate cases, discussions with those who know him well.

Even when this kind of selection is not possible, group membership should be based on some design. An individual can seldom be "categorized" as either a good or poor candidate for group membership because so much depends on the group's goals and upon interaction within its membership. There are some obvious qualifications for selection: (1) The individual's capacity to grasp

and retain knowledge; (2) his capacity to communicate; (3) whether he can attend meetings regularly; and (4) the absence of severe pathology.

Some group leaders have found success in building groups around a common interest. Others have formed groups with school dropouts as the basis for selection. Here, the discussion sessions would not remain exclusively on the act of dropping out of school, but would delve into some of the reasons for dropping out. They also expand into problem areas of the individual group members. Some groups have been formed of young people in search of employment, using this grouping technique not only to aid the youngsters in finding employment but also to prepare them for evaluating their job skills. Institutions for juvenile delinquents have successfully used counseling groups selected around such common denominators as new admissions, chronic runaways, and reentry into the community. More and more, the living group has been used as a means of working out the problem of relationships. These groups give living unit staff opportunities to participate in a meaningful manner and also aid in merging programs too often operating separately; e.g., group life and individual treatment programs.

## Size of groups

Opinions vary as to the appropriate size of groups, but one rule of thumb often used is that the smaller the group, the more each member will be expected to participate. This means there will be deeper involvement when the group size is 5 to 8 rather than when the group numbers 20 to 25. In larger groups, members can "hide," while in small groups participation is almost forced (1, p. 4). Also, in the large group, aggressive members can more readily shut out weaker ones, while the smaller group depends for its life on at least minimal participation by each member.

If the group is too small, however, "odd" members cannot be assimilated. In addition, the absence of a member affects how treatment proceeds. Harold Heard reported that group counseling was most successful with boys when the size of the group ranged from 8 to 10. He further recommended that the boys be about the same age and level of maturity (7, p. 126).

## Time, place, length of session

The time of the meeting, the meeting place, and the length of each session can affect the participants involved in group counseling.

In an institution, changes in the schedule may have to be made in order to provide time for group sessions, and this often provokes staff members who are asked to release youngsters to attend. Similarly, the probation officer has a problem in determining whether sessions should be held after school, after supper, or during the school day. If the meeting is scheduled after school, there will be a variety of objections: "I gotta get home and look after my little brother;" "I'm gonna get a job;" "They make me stay after school half the time." If after supper is suggested as the best time, many will indicate resistance to coming for meetings at that hour. Some will object on the grounds that it is too difficult getting to and from the meeting place after dark. Attempts to arrange sessions during the school day are seldom fruitful since they often require major shifts by a number of people.

The meeting place may have to be dictated by what is available. If only one or two places can be considered, then the choice is narrowed to this extent. But the important point is to determine what effect the meeting place will have on the attitudes of the participants. What is sought is freedom from interruptions or from the distractions of the institution or court, easy access for the participants, and physical comfort such as the provision for adequate heat, lighting, and chairs.

Perhaps the point can be made another way. If the meeting place is a gymnasium, the boys may well find their attention shifting to a sports activity; if the meeting place is a church, some members will react to this choice because of their feelings about religion; if the school is chosen for the meeting place, then the group counseling sessions may be thought of as just an extension of the school program which has been anathema to a particular youth; if the court is chosen as the meeting place, the "ring of authority may be loud and clear" to some and may tend to inhibit their participation. These illustrations are made in order to point out the limitations of such sites and to emphasize that the meeting room should be an isolated yet accessible building, and it should be neutral. Further, it should be a place where it is possible to relax and talk.

Some groups have benefited by being close to a bakery or drugstore so that refreshments could become a part of the group's being together. Occasionally, institutional groups have even met in the cafeteria, but the question here would be whether attention would be focused on problem solving or on the refreshments to come.

The length of the sessions might be determined by group membership. Less than an hour seems hardly worth the effort of assembling the group, while more than an hour and a half will

generally produce restlessness and ineffective discussion.

## Open or closed groups

A closed group's membership is fixed once it has proceeded to function and new members may not join. The closed group may begin with a larger number since it will lose members without replacing them. Understandably this group will become more accustomed to one another and relationships will be deeper since there is no opportunity for new members to play unsettling roles.

The open group is open to new membership. As members leave, new members are considered and eventually join. The fluctuating membership, however, can have both positive and negative results. The addition of a person to the group changes the group itself. To provide for as little shock as possible and in order to insure the transmission of the traditions and culture of the group already established, it is usually best to introduce only one or two new members at a time. The participants can assimilate one or two, but may find it difficult to take in more. The new members are often thrown together both by the older participants and by themselves because of their newness and strangeness. Therefore, although this type of group is open to new members, an interval of stabilization is necessary during which no new members are added.

The loss of a member also changes the group; each person reacts a little differently because one person has left. His leaving, however, can often serve as a basis for the group's discussion: What did the departing member add to the group's thinking and doing? What help, if any, did he get by being a member of the group?

In group counseling, interaction on the part of group members is most important, and interaction can become an empty term if the group dwindles to two or three members. A group this small has reached the point of questionable returns, and plans should be made to refer the members to other groups, to individual sessions —or the groups might be cancelled.

## Termination of groups

The group has by this time become an important part of a youngster's life. He may have gained considerable strength from his associations and deliberations. Therefore, sudden cancellation of group sessions could be traumatic to him and might cause considerable regression. At no time should a child be surprised by having the group "pulled out from under him."

Group counseling programs more often terminate because of lack of staff than because youngsters no longer need the service. Whatever the reason, the basis for terminating a group must rest on what is best for the youths involved. If another group is decided upon, which group should it be? Should all remaining members go to the same group? Is there a leader available to whom they can relate, or would individual sessions be better at this point?

Being released from probation may terminate membership in a group, but no youth should be removed from a group until he has received maximum benefits. In the case of institutionalized youth, however, membership in a group should not of itself negate release from the institution, especially if the community to which a young person returns has a broad aftercare program and he could be referred for group counseling.

# II.

# THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

A new group leader may question his ability as a leader as he contemplates meeting his first group. If he has volunteered to be a leader he might well ask himself, "What am *I* doing here?" Many other questions will flash through his mind as he wonders what he will do with the group. What *is* he supposed to do? What *is* his role?

Each leader represents a program or an agency which has general goals and purposes. Basically the leader is committed to carrying out the purpose of the agency in whatever position he is working. As the leader of a counseling group, he works toward the same goals, using the group as a vehicle. Whether he is a probation officer or an institutional worker, his goal of treatment and rehabilitation is the same for the children he may see in a group as it is for those he sees individually. A group setting should not change the basic goal and purpose which the group leader represents.

One of the first responsibilities of the leader of a new group is to share with the group its reasons for meeting together. Although each member should have been interviewed prior to becoming a member, a restatement of purpose at the first meeting is in order. A leader who begins by stating, "Now we all know why we're here," is likely to be bombarded by "No, we don't—tell us." A restatement of purpose in simple, nontechnical terms has a "togetherness" effect on the group and engenders a feeling of all starting at the same point—hearing the same thing at the same time.

The leader of an agency group must discuss ground rules with the group. These should be simple, without inhibiting participation or expression of ideas. Some ground rules have included prohibition against physically attacking another member or the

leader, damaging furniture, leaving the meeting room during sessions, and discussing group session happenings outside the meeting. Some agencies have had to face the questions of confidentiality and explaining the need for reporting law violations or contemplated violations.

Group members must be made aware of agency ground rules before joining a group. These rules must then be administered without change. Changes by the agency after the group has been operating will endanger any trust group members may have in the agency or the agency representative, the leader.

In the beginning stages of a group, the leader will probably be more directive. He will need to take the initiative for starting discussions. As the group becomes more accustomed to its own responsibility for carrying on the discussions, the leader will find that the youngsters depend on him less and less. With time and experience, the group will tend to feel more comfortable about speaking and sharing their ideas; members will be able to invest more of themselves and will be less anxious about their reactions and contributions. The increasing responsibility they assume for moving the group's discussions will lessen the leader's need for interjecting questions or comments.

After several meetings, a boy may feel more comfortable talking about his problems with his teachers—particularly if another group member has done so without unhappy results. A boy knows that the group leader mentioned this freedom of expression at the first session of the group, but when he has seen concrete evidence of this on the part of the leader and the group, even family relationships can be freely discussed if he knows whatever he says will be accepted. For example, one leader listened without comment when one of the group members blurted out his anger at his father.

The group leader's role includes that of holding up a mirror to reflect individual and group behavior. Repeating statements and rephrasing comments will sharpen the group's understanding of issues, comparisons, and alternatives. As he restates, the leader may ask, "Is this what you mean?" "At our last meeting, I thought we said thus and so." "How does this stack up with what we are saying now?" As he does this, each member of the group is also clarifying his individual ability for making decisions.

One of the most difficult roles a leader must undertake is in the role of the authority projected upon him by the group. To the group, he represents the world. This includes parents, courts, school, institutional staff, and other adults the members have known. They expect the same treatment from the leader as they have received from other adults (23, p. 10). To some members, the

leader represents a parent; to others, a police officer. Some will view him positively; others will see him as a negative personality. The latter situation contains the seeds of hostile reactions, both verbalized and unspoken.

Outbursts of a hostile, verbal nature may produce discomfort and self-protective reactions on the part of the leader. But the more experienced and secure leader will understand the underlying reasons for this reaction and will deal with it on an impersonal and helpful basis. A hostile retaliation by the leader will only reinforce the child's previous feelings: "You see, this guy isn't at all what he said he was. He gets mad at me just like my father." The skilled leader will help the individual and the group to analyze the incident for what it is without indulging in a verbal free-for-all. He can also dilute the hostility by empathizing with youth—by respecting them as persons rather than competing with them.

The responsibility for continuity rests with the leader. Over a period of time, changes in group composition and focus of discussion will come about.

The role of the leader is not an easy one. There are few prescribed rules to follow, and he cannot rely on gimmicks and formulas to carry him through. Much of the direction will come from the group itself, although he will need "to prime the pump." His greatest asset is himself and his belief in the group members. He must be committed to helping individual members and the group, as a whole, work out a method of identifying problems and finding acceptable solutions. A leader must believe people can change their behavior and that he can help them to do so by creating an atmosphere of acceptance where they can express feelings both positive and negative.

In an accepting atmosphere, the leader responds to his group with *no* preconceived ideas or expectations. Because each group is different, he cannot use his previous experience with other groups as a road map. Because each individual in the group is different from other group members, the leader cannot expect uniformity—nor does he strive toward it. Each session with the group will be different from other sessions because of the variations in the group, in the situation, and in himself.

Does he lead? Yes. Does he follow? Yes. Even the word "leader" can be misleading if applied according to the dictionary definition because the words "lead," "conduct," and "guide" are only visible on one side of the coin. This definition gives no indication of the depth or dimension of the group leader's role.

Unlike the traditional ideas of the function of a leader, the counseling leader is not the focal point. The group should not

look *to him* for the answers. He is more like a participant in a game of catch in which he constantly throws the ball back to the group: To solicit additional participation, he may toss it to one member not heretofore part of the discussion, or he may toss it up for anyone to catch. A leader who feels uncomfortable in this position will have little to offer a group. If his needs for personal satisfaction rest on giving answers, the group's purposes and the possibility of reaching successful goals are in serious jeopardy.

For example, the leader must know when to speak and when to be quiet. When the group is silent, he has several possibilities which may help him decide which path to take. It may be "thinking time," resistance, hostility, or merely lack of knowledge. The leader's total response to the silence—verbal or nonverbal—is important. Fortunately, the ability to recognize the various kinds of silence increases with experience.

## Qualifications

The group counselor is a person who has become interested in the idea of dealing with groups of people in order to find a new way to reach them and get them to work on their problems. Only occasionally has he been hired to start groups; rather, he has petitioned the administration to let him join with others in seeking an additional way to work with young people with problems—a technique that he understands has potential. Although his information may be sparse, his interest in the group counseling method has carried him to explore the possibilities of this different approach. The first factor in his choice to become a group leader, then, has been one of motivation.

Another factor has been in terms of his place of employment. Group counseling has taken root in a variety of correctional settings: probation departments, parole departments, prisons, children's institutions, jails, honor camps, prerelease guidance centers, detention facilities, forestry camps, rehabilitation centers, and correctional institutions. In addition, a variety of both professional and subprofessional staff members have responded to the invitation to lead group counseling sessions.

Factor number three in his choice is related to motivation; it has to do with his personality. If he is convinced that talking freely together improves staff-inmate relations, that it tends to release the energy of participants to work on their problems, he may be willing—even eager—to try this venture. This willingness is probably a more important ingredient than those usually associated with personality descriptions.

But perhaps the most valuable personal characteristic a

group leader possesses is his ability to transmit his liking and respect for teenagers. Understanding, tolerance, patience, energy—combined with imagination and the willingness to experiment—should also characterize the leader, because, in working with youth, he has the task of being both firm and flexible. He must also be consistent and dependable. The responsibility rests upon the leader for establishing the delicate balance between permissiveness and control so necessary to holding useful meetings.

In this pamphlet, no attempt will be made to establish qualifications needed in terms of education and experience for the group leader. However, in order to be a successful leader, he should know: (1) The social goals of the court or institution, because his work with groups should reflect the philosophy of the organization; (2) Community resources and mores—where to go for a needed service and the accepted way to seek what is wanted; (3) The principles of personality change and how this can be brought about (3, 11); (4) The principles of group composition; and (5) How to effectively record the progress made by group members.

In addition, a group leader needs to possess skills in: (1) Leading discussions—to encourage the group to struggle in their deliberations and to show them when to move on to more profitable areas of discussion, because group members expect and want this direction and support even when venting their hostile feelings; (2) Observing—because the nonverbal behavior of group members is as meaningful as what they say, and where and how a person sits may reveal more than the statements he makes; (3) Making use of what transpires in the group as content for the group meetings—because "what happens" in the meeting is the best possible data for the group to analyze; and (4) Responding to each group member by not playing favorites, but by making it clear that each person in the group is respected and valued equally, and, in this way, helping individuals in the group to respect and value each other.

## Volunteer leaders

References are continually made to the short supply of staff for correctional programs (14, p. 37; 19, p. 1).

One of the methods to improve this situation—many times shunned by correctional administrators—is the use of volunteers. Volunteers who have the qualifications. education, and personality traits parallel to those of professional group leaders can and are willing to make a contribution to probation or institutional programs. Some administrators with a negative attitude toward volunteers may have had unfortunate experiences, but there are measures

to counteract this; e.g., the same methods of selection and training used for full-time employees. A volunteer program which will benefit both the agency and volunteer must be planned and operated carefully. Indeed, the planning of a volunteer program would entail as much, if not more, consideration than planning for regular staff. But if so much effort is necessary, one may ask, what are the advantages? Some of them are:

1. Opportunity to establish more groups;
2. Opportunity to establish groups other than during working times, such as on evenings or weekends;
3. Broader community knowledge and support of agency programs;
4. A possible reservoir for recruiting full-time staff;
5. A sense of accomplishment for the volunteer;
6. A demonstration of adult community responsibility to youth; and
7. The training that results in a volunteer who can function more efficiently in his chosen field.

Volunteers, therefore, should not frighten administrators and other workers in the field of corrections. Rather, volunteers should be looked upon as a resource and a means of reaching more children.

## Student leadership

Another possibility for group leaders rests in the use of college students in a program in which the students further the work of the agency and, at the same time, receive training for their own careers.

Here, as with volunteers, prior planning is most important. Well developed guidelines should be cooperatively formed with both school and agency fully understanding their responsibilities. Supervision in this program is particularly significant since goals of both the school and the agency should be furthered. But if this cannot be done without diluting school and institutional standards, it might be better to postpone the building of a student unit until suitable conditions prevail.

# III.

# TRAINING FOR GROUP LEADERSHIP

Group counseling means different things to the people engaged in working with groups. For this reason, the literature on group counseling can sometimes be misleading since terms and frames of reference are often not interchangeable. For our purposes, we define the "professional" as a person who has achieved a graduate degree in sociology, social work, education, or psychology, and whose education and experience include the study of groups, group behavior, and the group as a therapeutic agent. The subprofessional is one without these qualifications. The authors quoted below may not make this distinction. The literature in the field helps to find answers to two of the major issues regarding training personnel.

## Training the subprofessional

The first of these issues is: Can subprofessional personnel be trained to do an effective job? If so, who is to do the training? What disciplines (psychiatry, psychology, social work, sociology, education) are qualified to do the training?

Actually, many disciplines have contributed to the literature regarding groups, and the decision regarding the best training may well hinge on the background of the trainee himself. If his frame of reference is social work, the study of principles of social group work will be appropriate; if his background is sociology, the sociologists who write about small groups should prove helpful; if he responds to the teachings of clinical psychologists, psychology may be his best resource. But no one discipline has a monopoly on the knowledge and skills appropriate for group counseling.

Sarri and Vinter are skeptical about the use of nonprofes-

sionals as group counselors because the goals pursued by them tend to be superficial and diffuse. Their report points up that the groups led by nonprofessionals offer a period of treatment averaging less than 4 months, as contrasted with those led by professionally trained workers where the groups offer treatment of a year or more. They recognize that claims have been made of positive results from the group counseling programs under the leadership of nonprofessionals, but they bring out that, upon evaluation, the results have been disappointing when compared with results from programs directed by professionals. Their findings also indicate that group treatment by professional staff is superior to that of nonprofessional personnel. They add, however, that "nonprofessional personnel can participate in treatment efforts most effectively under close professional supervision." (21) In making their point they further state, "We must challenge the belief that group processes unguided by a skilled worker are somehow self-correcting or that mere participation in a group is therapeutic." (21, p. 339)

A different point of view is expressed by Irwin, who doubts that group counseling in juvenile probation is too complex to try without special training. She points out that goals may be limited but achievement great, particularly when contrasted to the service available to the same probationers on the basis of one-to-one counseling. Her article states that group reporting cut down on absences and enabled the probationers to talk and to risk themselves in the group. In addition, group reporting proved a time-saver and provided the probation officer with more material for the evaluation of each person's progress (15).

Irwin has less concern than Sarri and Vinter regarding the superficiality of group discussion. The report on the "Older Boys' Group" contains the following statement: "Deep feelings were not analyzed; problems were not probed; discussion was usually superficial and sometimes intellectualized. Yet it was obvious that this was a therapeutic experience." (15, p. 342)

Faust is convinced that staff without professional training in group work can function effectively in group counseling of limited depth. He sees this method as one that enables the court to make better use of its personnel, to provide a better service to many of the probationers, and to help the probation officers improve both the quantity and quality of their services (6).

The State of California, under the leadership of Norman Fenton, developed training programs for career correctional employees which made wide use of the group counseling method in both juvenile and adult institutions. One of the major training devices used was demonstrations. Staff members were invited to attend and observe group counseling sessions. This enabled them

to hear and feel what went on—a more helpful technique than lecturing. Additional training included acting as coleader of a group and participating in a group of leaders-in-training.

The opinions quoted thus far generally support group counseling, but the experts disagree regarding the qualifications needed by a group leader. There is agreement. however, that the success of the program depends upon the ability and skill of the personnel, which seems to favor the use of professional staff. But this staff is in short supply, and they increase operating costs. The alternative may be to train available staff for group counseling, or to delay the introduction of this counseling into the program. Faust reported:

> "Our first reaction was that it would be ineffectual, and perhaps even dangerous, without the leadership of a professionally trained group worker. On the other hand, when a person is seriously injured and a physician is not available, the proper application of first-aid will certainly make the injured party more comfortable and may even save his life, despite the fact that the practitioner's technical knowledge of medicine is limited."

This analogy, of course, makes two critical assumptions: (1) that the application of a "first-aid" technique is proper, and (2) that the practitioner is fully aware of the limits of his knowledge and skill and confines his practice accordingly (6, p. 350).

## Should group counseling be delayed?

*IF* the better trained counselor has a greater chance of success, should the introduction of group counseling be delayed until professionally trained staff are available?

Consideration of this question rests upon the following factors:

1. What are the goals of the program? Is more going to be expected of this new method than of the methods now in use?
2. How soon will professionally trained staff be available? Six months? One year? Two years?
3. How much will it cost? Will more money be needed, or will this be within present budgetary limits? Might there not be a long-range saving if professional staff are hired?

Working out the details of training for group counseling in a court or institution should not present formidable obstacles. The pattern of training for all casework positions should present an acceptable format.

Training program suggestions can be found in the Appendix, along with a series of exercises in problem solving.

## Training resources

Resources including books and journal articles on the use of groups should be in the staff library. Films and tapes would also be helpful. University libraries, State health departments, and national organizations may have them available at little or no cost. All of these materials should be evaluated for appropriateness by the person who supervises the group leaders.

Institutes and conferences may also offer sessions dealing with group counseling and should be attended whenever possible by staff involved in the group counseling program. Seminars to which guest speakers are invited may substitute for staff meetings, particularly if the speaker is an experienced practitioner.

# IV

# PROBLEMS OF LEADERSHIP

Anyone who assumes leadership of a group would naturally like to have some preliminary knowledge of what to expect. However, it is impossible to describe the course to which even one group will faithfully adhere. There are no road maps, and this is one of the main reasons why working with groups is so challenging.

Predictions of individual and group behavior are, of necessity, general and broad; thus, problems for which leaders are seeking answers more often lead to discussions involving the factors which have contributed to the problems.

The new group leader, having misgivings as he contemplates meeting with his group, may even doubt his ability to work with them. This questioning attitude is natural and to be expected. It should be pointed out that these feelings can even reappear periodically as new problems and new situations present themselves. It is hoped the group leader will be buoyed by understanding and helpful supervision during these trying times, for with experience and helpful supervision he gradually becomes more assured and comfortable.

The first meeting of the group will probably be the one to cause the new group leader the most anxiety: "How will the group accept me?" "What do I do?" "How do I start?" "What do I say?"

The group is also asking questions—about the leader: "What kind of person is he?" What will he do?" If he is replacing another leader, comparisons are inevitable.

The group leader's initial efforts should be toward building an accepting "climate." He may be greeted by tension, resistance, and, possibly, with hostility. But, accepting these as natural, he should be able to absorb them as testing incidents—and still show an acceptance of group members. As a feeling of trust and freedom emerges, the group will become more open and less superficial in its discussions.

Several steps should be taken before the group convenes. Each member should have been interviewed, the purpose of the group explained, and the reason for having a leader discussed. This should be repeated again with the entire group at the first meeting.

Introductions should be made. These should be at the discretion of each group member. For instance, a group member might want to be called by a nickname. Individuals might then be invited to say something about themselves, about where they live, went to school, their particular interests, what they want to gain from the group, or other items which might contribute to the members of the group becoming familiar with one another. ***But each person should be allowed to make his own decision about the amount of information he reveals about himself.*** Recognized in this situation is the delinquent's reluctance to share information with others—particularly with adults.

The leader should also introduce himself and mention something about himself. (Leaders are often in doubt about how they wish to be addressed. A uniform decision should be made about this at the administrative level, and then should be binding on all group leaders.)

During the initial phase of the group's existence, the group will project hostility on the courts, police, school officials, and the institution. The leader, as a representative of the adult world, may also be the target of these feelings. Some time must be allowed for this natural procedure to take place—for a questioning of the program and of the group leader, and also for a reluctance to discuss themselves. This period is uncomfortable. However, it cannot be allowed to continue endlessly or the group will disintegrate. The leader must realistically recognize the situation, and then move on to more fruitful discussions.

One of the most difficult situations for leaders and groups to experience is the periods of silence. This always seems longer than it really is. But whatever the length, it is uncomfortable for both leader and group members. The level of tolerance is different for each group, and the leader may need to break these silent periods before the toleration point is reached. (Silence does not necessarily mean that nothing is happening in the group, for many people need periods of contemplation and thinking.) It is possible that members within the group will begin speaking; but, if this does not happen, the leader should initiate conversation. When overly long periods of silence arise, ***some*** leaders will place sole responsibility back on the group for resuming the discussion. If it appears that the members cannot, or will not, continue their discussion, the group leader may dismiss the group on the basis that the

participants have nothing to contribute. This is a drastic measure. It should be used only when a leader and his group are well established; that is, when the group has developed into a strong, cohesive unit, and the "rejection" of the members by the leader will not disrupt the machinery of the group when it assembles again. The effectiveness of this method rests with the skill of the leader in knowing and understanding the members of his group.

The inexperienced group leader often wonders about using the group to answer questions; he feels it would be much simpler to answer them himself. Questions arise such as: "Why do we have to go to school? You don't learn nothin' there anyway." "What's the use of going to see my probation officer once a month? He don't do nothin' for me." "How come the kids that I was with are still on the outs?" Such questions should always be directed back to the group for discussion. The leader should not expound on the subject as a lecturer might do, because it is his responsibility to help the group look for answers together. Although the group sees the answers as important, the leader recognizes the processes by which they were achieved as being more important.

A leader is in a vulnerable position to be challenged for leadership in the group. We know juvenile delinquents often have difficulty relating to adult authority, and the leader represents such authority (2). Although difficult, the group leader must be secure enough to understand and evaluate challenges to his leadership. He may ask the group why such behavior is necessary, thus involving the members in evaluating the incident and looking to their own behavior.

Absences of group members are often troublesome, but several methods are available to deal with this problem.

If group participation is voluntary, restrictions on attendance are dubious; however, some commitment is necessary once a decision has been made to join a group. Some leaders have made it mandatory for a group member wishing to drop out to explain to the group his reasons for leaving. Continued absences should be closely scrutinized by the leader for reasons other than those voiced by the youngster; it may be necessary to meet with the youth privately to learn his real reasons for wishing to leave. Where attendance is compulsory, penalties are associated with leaving. For groups made up of youngsters on probation or in institutions, the term "voluntary" is, of course, a loose one when the probability exists for revocation of probation or other penalties.

The question of authority and its use have thus been a subject of much concern. There are those who deplore its use, particularly in treatment programs in institutions for juvenile delinquents. Another school of thought has been growing which speaks of the

positive use of authority and the need for delinquents to experience authority that is fair and consistent. This philosophy has been suggested in a review of a research project which studied professional and delinquent evaluation of professional methods used with delinquents. In samplings which include 235 professional and 332 delinquent responses, one outcome reads as follows: "The delinquent seems to be seeking a parental surrogate in the professional. He rejects the professional in the role of a pal and instead wants the professional to be a mature adult who is concerned about him, respects him, teaches him to relate better socially, and helps him take his place in the world. The distant and professional attitude of the professional will disappoint the delinquent." (10)

# V.

# SUPERVISION

Contrary to popular jokes about the "snoopervisor," supervision's primary goal is helping workers function more effectively. The amount of supervision needed may differ depending on the group leader. If his professional education and training have been extensive, he will need supervision of a different nature than that of someone who has little training; if he has only a little training, he will need to rely heavily on the supervisor's ability to guide him toward acquiring knowledge and toward its proper application.

Agencies need to look to their own staff for supervisors, or hire part-time professionals from other agencies. For many reasons, however, a full-time staff member hired to function in a supervisory role is the most desirable because he has better knowledge of the group counseling program and the agency goals to which the program is committed. Also, the commitment to a program is usually much greater on the part of a full-time rather than a part-time employee, and schedules are more easily arranged with agency staff than with someone contracted to supervise from an outside agency.

Why is supervision so important that a program ***cannot*** function without it? A review of some of the literature places great emphasis on two equally important aspects of supervision. One is emphasis on the goals of the agency; the other, on the continued efforts directed toward the improvement of a worker's skill in his job.

The supervisor of a group counseling program must insure the program's functioning within the basic philosophy and goals of the agency. For example, a juvenile court which proclaims a policy of integration cannot condone groups which are obviously segregated, and an institution which advocates a treatment-oriented program must reflect this philosophy in its group counseling program.

The second part of the purpose for supervision rests in the importance it places on furthering the skill of the group leader so

that he may become a more competent agency staff member. Supervision, of course, will not be a new experience for the group leader. As a staff member of an agency, supervision has been an integral part of his experience.

The responsibility for successful supervision is shared by both the supervisor and the supervisee; the relationship is one in which both persons give and receive. Being more comfortable "receiving," many group leaders have difficulty in assuming the responsibility for "giving" to this relationship, and they become confused or disappointed. They often expect supervisors to tell them what to do, because they are looking for blueprints to follow which will insure success. They become reluctant to share their problems and questions with the supervisor for fear this will denote failure.

The effective blending of "give and take" on the part of supervisor and group leader can result in positive gains because both are learners and teachers—teaching one another and learning from one another. Ultimately, the seasoned and experienced group leader should move into a position of using his supervisor on a consultative basis only, thus allowing the supervisor to concentrate on helping the newer, less experienced leaders.

Although most supervision is done on an individual basis, a valid case can be made for group supervision. Just as groups do not cancel the need for one-to-one relationships, group supervision should never supplant the individual supervisory conference. They actually complement one another, and supervision in groups can be useful for many of the same reasons groups are useful to children. Of course, the supervisory group has different goals and different methods, but there are many positive results to such an endeavor.

If possible, planning for a group counseling program should involve supervisory staff so their thinking may be reflected in establishing goals and standards. Training programs for group counseling should reach this group first.

The building of an effective group counseling program rests heavily upon the supervision available to the group leaders. Supervision does not dictate how a group leader should work with his group, but is committed to the "release of worker individuality, encouragement of initiative and the inquiring approach, fostering of independent functioning and individual assumption of leadership."(26)

# VI.

# RECORDKEEPING

Gordon Hamilton has said, "The professional record is the worker's tool."(12) To the group leader, the record charts the happenings and movements of each individual and the group. It can also be used by the supervisor as a means to evaluate the group leader's adherence to agency policy and to improve his competence. The record may serve as a research tool to point up areas needing further study, or serve as a basis for program and budget planning. The group record, in short, is the closest thing to the supervisor's presence within the group.

We have come a long way from the slavish group records which were practically verbatim and covered each moment. Today, we encourage a group leader to record what is useful, in a manner comfortable to him.

Records by different group leaders will, of course, be different. But as long as a record indicates ***who*** did ***what*** to ***whom, how*** and with a possible ***why,*** it can be a useful record. Group leaders do not have the time to spend writing voluminous records; and the supervisor whose staff includes several group leaders is already hard pressed to keep abreast of group happenings without increasing the length of records. The main purpose of the record can be served by its being well written and succinct; the useful record is not necessarily the long one.

There is a danger inherent in the writing of records. Delinquents are prone to be suspicious and wary of records and recordkeeping. Group members will sometimes look upon the record as a breach of confidence—and this fear of being "on record" can result in superficial discussion, play acting, and manipulation(13).

One method of overcoming this difficulty may be the "summary" of group happenings written at the end of each session. When a group reaches a more independent stage, this function can even be carried out by a group member. Whichever method is followed, mentioning individual names should be avoided.

A successful method used in some groups is the tape recorder

which, after a few sessions, is easily accepted by the group members. Leaders have reported that groups have gotten so accustomed to the microphone they forget its presence.

With continued help, the group leader can improve his group records and his ability to analyze the significance of behavior. Early records will report incidents; later ones should indicate some understanding of the meaning of behavior, and the leader's methods for dealing with it.

# VII.

# EVALUATION

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For many people interested in setting up a new program, the term "evaluation" is a grim one—a necessary evil. Frequently, more effort has gone into the avoidance of evaluation than into coping with the variety of problems it raises. But such avoidance or neglect blinds one to a source of new programs.

An administrator may insist on evaluation because it lends prestige to the program and is now the "in" thing to do. Or it may be that the funds allocated to his program came from a source that requires evaluation; i.e., the administrator may have no intention of using the results, but getting the money and extra staff is important to him. In this case, obviously, evaluation is a front and of no real value.

Another person may want to incorporate evaluation into a new program effort in order to support theories and justify the program. Such motivation has aspects of legitimacy, but it tends to focus on success and to avoid careful scrutiny of total effectiveness.

Still another type of evaluation is designed to compare or contrast techniques and procedures. For example, do group members respond better to activities, to film presentations with discussion later, or to group discussions where the subject is chosen by the group itself? What effect does the meeting place have on the group? Are seating arrangements significant? Here, a technical question is posed for study, but evaluation has but limited usage.

These limitations are real, but they are not sufficient to bypass evaluation of programs, because evaluation is well worth the planning and persistence it is apt to require. It is as important as any of the phases required in developing a group counseling program, such as:

1. The time needed for planning the program and developing the leaders;

2. The group counseling programs in operation; and

3. The decision regarding continuing the program.

An adequate evaluation enables both the practitioner and the administrator to reach relatively objective and definitive answers. It is designed to provide answers to such questions as: Have we accomplished what we set out to do? Have the behavior and attitude of group members changed in the desired direction? What changes are still necessary in order to improve service?

If evaluation does bring sound data, if new ways are discovered, then a willingness will develop to include it in planning. Evaluation becomes useful and, therefore, desirable. The work behind it becomes as meaningful as the planning of the program. There are, however, other purposes as well (25, p. 2).

Both practically and ideally, evaluation is a search for fair answers and a guide to planning future programs. To achieve these answers, the questions asked must relate to the objectives of group counseling. Therefore, because these objectives *are* to be tested, it is important for the evaluator to be present when they are decided upon, as a statement of objectives tends to be grand and imposing and to contain abstractions that defy testing. The evaluator holds a check on this, since he is aware of the necessity of ***measurement***.

Having agreed upon the basic objectives, a trainer and an evaluator need to specify what they expect group counseling to accomplish, and then, with an administrator, produce a statement delineating desired behavioral changes due to group counseling.

At least three measurements of success can be considered:

1. Changes in behavior—Have the youths in group counseling been re-referred to a juvenile court for committing delinquent acts? What were the referrals for? Are the acts less serious or basically the same as for the original referrals? Have group members obtained jobs? Bettered their school attendance records? Improved school behavior?

2. Changes in knowledge and attitudes—What knowledge does the leader plan to impart, and what attitudes does he hope to develop? If the leader wants to tell the group members the rules of probation that apply to them, how can he later determine whether they understood and remembered what was said? In regard to attitudes, it might be well that a change is needed regarding how participants feel about authority figures such as police, probation officers, or judges.

3. Changes in staff knowledge and in agency or community pro-

graming—What additional knowledge have staff accrued regarding youth? Have community resources for youth been established as a result of findings from group counseling sessions? Have other agencies adopted this method of treatment?

A typical listing of goals for participants in group counseling sessions might well be:

1. to release tension;
2. to provide opportunities for testing new ideas;
3. to develop inner controls and understanding of the world, and how to react to the world and how it responds;
4. to reduce stigma;
5. to find different methods of resolving problems; and
6. to gain new perceptions and competence.

To the trainer, these are legitimate goals. How can they be evaluated? These questions could be asked, for example, of a trainer:

1. What is the definition of tension? What tension is to be relieved? How is this to be measured?
2. Will the group record show what new ideas were introduced in the group sessions and the way(s) they were tested?
3. What are inner controls? How can they be spotted? How can an evaluator determine if a participant has learned about his own responses and the responses of others to him?
4. Do group members feel the stigma of being labelled delinquent? Do they indicate that the group experience alleviates stigma?
5. Specifically, what methods have they found to resolve their problems? Has one of them been through group discussions?
6. How can new perceptions be tested? What competence is required, and whose standards will be used to test it?

# VIII.

# ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Because the administration of an institution or court is responsible for achieving its social purpose—the rehabilitation of the youth it serves—the administration must develop policies and procedures to promote this goal. In the light of these same policies and procedures, the administration also decides on the feasibility of changing to newer programs. But change often proves difficult; it can prove ineffective, or even harmful—and staff members often oppose change, believing present methods adequate, or at least the best that are available. Thus, in order to inaugurate a new service, ***both*** administration and line staff should be involved in the planning. The program cannot succeed without administration support; it cannot survive without staff acceptance. This is true since experience has shown that while one or two staff members may be enthusiastically in support of a new program, others may resist its introduction or be totally indifferent.

Evidence of the need for administrative support and good planning to initiate group counseling is found in this report from California:

> "Its [group counseling's] initial trial in the San Diego Department of Honor Camps proved to be very satisfactory because the Director provided the necessary good leadership and because adequate preparation and staff training had been made. In some places, group counseling was introduced perhaps too enthusiastically or impulsively. If an agency does not make the necessary preparation before its use, group counseling is not likely to work out satisfactorily. The early failures have been instructive because they proved that without strong leadership at the top, sufficient time and effort to inform and train the staff, and subsequent provision of adequate supervision, group counseling may not succeed."(7)

In his summary at the end of the chapter, Dr. Fenton lists the criteria to be met before initiating such a program:

> "First, there must be acceptance and support from those in the top echelons of the agency. Second, adequate preparation, especially staff training, must be assured in advance. Third, a beginning should be made with the voluntary participation of a few genuinely interested employees. Fourth, group counseling must be introduced at first slowly and carefully. No pressure should be exerted. Those who volunteer to be trained to conduct groups need to be well informed of the many difficulties and limitations of group counseling. It should not be oversold as though it were a panacea, which it certainly is not. Fifth, the limits of the content of the sessions and the behavior in the group session should be as fully defined as possible by the agency. And, finally, there must be some supervision, some resource person or persons to observe the group sessions and to whom the group leaders may go when they need advice regarding any phase of the conduct of group counseling."(7)

If the administration of an institution or court supports the introduction of group counseling, it must provide staff and space, indicate the level of job performance expected, evaluate the program, and prepare a job description to indicate the group counselor's scope of responsibility. For example, will the group leader also see group members on an individual basis? Will he be in touch with their parents?

Similar questions arise regarding a change in duties when an institutional worker begins group counseling. What shifts in his work schedule will be necessary? If the group is to meet during the day, what arrangements need to be made in the schedules of the counselor and counselees. The question will occasionally arise about a group member being excused from another assignment to come to a group meeting. This matter of attendance needs to be understood. If it is voluntary at first, but later mandatory, all concerned need to know this. The group members themselves, aware of the conditions of membership and attendance, may at times use this to stir up trouble among the staff members. On occasion, group members have even reported that anyone belonging to a group gets the worst work assignments (7).

Some administrations may question the value of group counseling. But even if too much is claimed for the new program, those who question it serve to bring into focus what its real usefulness can be by pointing up that the new program, although not the single answer, may be one which can serve part of a varied

"clientele." The administration has the responsibility of working this new program into its total program and of measuring the impact of group counseling only in terms of the benefits derived by its participants.

The administration is most helpful when it makes it clear that group counseling is now an integral part of the treatment program—that it has a high priority.

# APPENDIX

The following material is offered to stimulate the building of a training program for group counseling leaders. The first section suggests topics for discussion for training programs. The second part presents problems that are apt to arise in group counseling sessions. Added interest may be kindled by employing elements of "role playing," with trainees working on solutions to the problems.

## Training program suggestions

1. Questions to be resolved during the training sessions include the following:

- How will group counseling fit in with the present service offered?
- Is group counseling a substitute for casework service?
- What status will the group worker have on the staff?
- Will there be any difference in pay or hours?
- To what extent is the administrator backing this program?
- If the staff member finds he is not suited to working with groups, will there be a penalty?
- Will the present program be diluted by group counseling?
- Is participation in the group counseling program by staff completely voluntary or an "expected" voluntary activity?
- Will participation have a bearing in the competitive status of the staff, and should this be recognized and discussed?

2. Discussion of advantages and disadvantages to group counseling:

ADVANTAGES

- Some people feel more free to talk within a group, but would be inarticulate in a one-to-one counseling situation.
- Respect from peers is more important to many adolescents than respect or help from an adult.
- In a group, the youth not only learns from others, he also contributes to others.
- Some youths feel that correction from group members is more acceptable than from a person in authority.
- Group members can talk about subjects of concern to them with less emphasis on subjects of particular interest to adults.
- Different opinions by group members can be tolerated and understood whereas, in the one-to-one counseling situation, the impact of adults' beliefs may inhibit expression of differences of opinion and values.
- Group reporting may cut down on absences.

DISADVANTAGES

- Group counseling may be shallow and superficial in content.
- Youngsters who know each other may not participate honestly in group sessions.
- Delinquent youngsters may scapegoat the weakest member of the group and can tear down the weak defenses of disturbed members.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- Members may become rivalrous for the attention of the leader.

3. Which youngsters in the caseload are most in need of help? Are they more apt to respond to individual or group counseling? Should cottage, school, and work assignments be arranged so that a group is together while in the institution where close peer relationships can be formed? If this is a probation group, should each member of the group be on probation to the group leader? Is membership in the group to be voluntary? How many to a group? Where will it meet? Can outside activities be considered after a group is going well?

4. What are the qualifications for a group leader? Are co-leaders feasible? What happens when a group leader becomes ill, goes on vacation, or leaves the agency?

5. How can objectives be measured?

## Problems arising in group counseling

1. The group leader finds that a group member is competing with him for leadership of the group. How should the leader deal with the problem?

2. A group member asks if material discussed in group sessions is discussed with anyone. How should the leader answer him?

3. The group leader is taking notes during a group session and a member of the group challenges this. How should the leader handle this?

4. Does the group leader take measures to protect a member who is being verbally attacked by the group?

5. A group member returns after an absence from several meetings. How should the leader deal with this? Does he involve the group?

6. An open group is being considered for two boys on probation. Does the leader prepare the group for their inclusion? If so, how?

7. Should a group discuss a member when he is not present?

8. A group has been meeting once weekly for 6 weeks. According to the leader, the sessions are taken up by gripes against the court, school, and parents. What responsibility does the leader have for moving the group on to more substantive material? Or should the group be allowed to assume its own speed in movement?

9. The probation group decides to go bowling. At the alley it is discovered a mistake has been made and the alley for which reservations have been made is not and will not be available. How does the leader handle this situation?

10. An institution group talks freely about the shortcomings of a cottage staff person. What should be the leader's reaction?

11. The probation group discusses the inability of the adult world to understand its members. Remarks are made about adult inconsistency and hypocrisy. They ask the leader if he ever did anything to get into trouble. How should the leader answer this?

12. An institution group has as a member a boy whose behavior is often bizarre and inappropriate. He is often the butt of jokes and laughter. How should the leader handle this situation?

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